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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000443

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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AF/S FOR S. HILL  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN  
USAID FOR E. LOKEN  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#)  
SUBJECT: THE COLLAPSE OF A ONCE SHINING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Sensitive but unclassified - please handle accordingly.

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) The University of Zimbabwe (UZ) is on the verge of collapse as a result of a continuing three- month strike by lecturers, insufficient resources, and dilapidated conditions. Additionally, the UZ has been wracked by violence as security forces have attacked students protesting university conditions and GOZ oppression. Problems with the administration of qualifying exams for secondary students hoping to enter the UZ have forced thousands of students to put their plans on hold. Meanwhile, the children of elites, including offspring of ruling party officials, escape the failing educational system by studying abroad, mainly in the U.S., U.K. and Australia. End Summary.

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Lecturers Strike For Better Wages  
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¶2. (U) The University of Zimbabwe (UZ) campus in Harare is barely functioning as a strike by undergraduate faculty over paltry wages stretches into its third month and threatens to nullify the entire academic term. Only about two weeks of undergraduate classes have taken place since the beginning of the term, which is set to finish at the end of May. UZ administrators have proposed extending the term to permit time to prepare for exams, but lecturers have balked at the

idea. As things stand now, approximately 1,000 UZ final year students will not graduate on time.

13. (U) Undergraduate lecturers continue to hold out for an acceptable pay increase. At present, the monthly net salary of a tenured UZ lecturer is equivalent to approximately US\$30 (at the unofficial parallel market rate of Z\$30,000:US\$1). The Poverty Datum Line (the minimum required to meet the needs of an average family of five) was Z\$1.7 million (about US\$57 at the parallel market rate) in March. UZ administrators recently offered an increase that would have given faculty a net salary of approximately Z\$3.8 million (about US\$126 at the parallel market rate), but the lecturers turned it down because the new salary would not have started until July and inflation (reliable private sector economists estimate annualized inflation to be between 8,500 and 14,000 percent and rising rapidly) would have quickly negated the increase.

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Violence Rocks Campus  
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14. (SBU) Lecturers are not the only ones suffering on campus. Campus and state security agents are targeting student leaders, who have protested University conditions and GOZ policies, for arrests and beatings. In a May 8 incident at UZ Harare campus, Clifford Hlatshwayo, vice president of the Student Representative Council, suffered a broken arm and internal injuries when he was attacked in his dorm room by several men. Hlatshwayo told poloff he was asleep in his room when some men pounded on his door around 1:00 AM claiming to be campus security. When he opened the door,

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four to six men, who he suspected were state security agents, attacked him with iron bars.

15. (U) On May 10, riot police broke up a meeting to plan student elections at the UZ Harare campus by firing tear gas and beating students. Two student leaders were arrested. According to student representatives, one suffered a broken arm and the other internal ear bleeding. Prosecutors declined to file charges, but police refused to release them until the High Court on May 15 ordered their release. According to a May 17 press release from the UZ Student Executive Council, as a result of the May 10 meeting the University expelled one student and suspended eight others.

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Dilapidated Conditions Fuels Frustration  
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16. (SBU) Conditions at the UZ Harare campus are in a total state of disrepair, according to Hlatshwayo. Of 36 toilets in one dorm building on campus, only three are functional. Additionally, several floors of students at the dorm are forced to share one or two working showers. Hlatshwayo added that the food served at the campus cafeteria was almost inedible. The sadza (the staple food of Zimbabwe) was watered-down and up to 40 students typically shared one KG of meat. He added that students, who have scrimped to pay school fees, were growing increasingly restive as the lecturers' strike wears on and conditions at campus worsen.

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Cancelling Exam Gives New Meaning to Senior Slump  
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17. (U) Jameson Timba, chairman of the Association of Trust Schools, told us that the ZIMSEC exam, required for entry into Zimbabwe's university system and next scheduled for June, may be cancelled due to a lack of resources to administer the exam. (Note. The exam is normally offered in June and November. End Note.) Timba said that the cancellation of the June exam and a delay in scoring last

November's exam had put in jeopardy university plans of thousands of students.

18. (U) Rebecca Zeigler-Mano, director of the Embassy's Education USA program, told us that the ZIMSEC problems and the deteriorating condition of the University of Zimbabwe had resulted in increasing numbers of students taking the Cambridge exams, which must be paid for in foreign currency, with the intent of studying outside the country, often in the U.S., UK, and Australia. Many of the students that have access to foreign currency and can afford the extra expense of the Cambridge exams come from ZANU-PF families.

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Comment  
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19. (U) During the first two decades of independence the Zimbabwe education system was considered a shining star in Africa and the University of Zimbabwe was regarded as a world-class institution. In fact, many of Zimbabwe's current political and economic elites are graduates of the University. The quality of education, however, has suffered

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dramatically as a result of the seven-year economic decline and the University is struggling to survive. It is ironic that children of the ruling elites who are responsible for educational collapse are not affected -- many are studying in the U.S., the UK, or Australia -- while their parents decry the policies of these countries.

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